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Faith in the Movement  
Faith-Based Community Gardens in New York City and Long Island

By

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With Honors

May 2015

**APPROVED**

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## **Abstract**

Community gardens are a distinct and significant component of the current environmental movement especially in urban areas. However over time many of them suffer from insufficient support and/or neglect. This investigation will seek to discover specific techniques utilized in Faith-based (religiously affiliated) gardens which could be applied ubiquitously to any of the growing community gardens throughout the world to help make them more successful and sustainable.

The research is guided by three questions: (1) What can be learned from faith-based community gardens? (2) Which aspects of religious institutions make them conducive to agricultural projects/ are religion and gardening naturally connected? (3) Is faith-based agriculture a unique environmental movement? To address these research questions, interviews were conducted with individuals associated and involved with faith-based community agriculture initiatives in New York City and Long Island, including members of the public and non-profits in the region. The data was collected in the form of hand-written notes and typed transcripts and analyzed using a grounded theory approach.

Based on the propensity of emergent themes in the interview transcripts, this study found that members highlighted a feeling of making a difference and performing some level of community service as a key component of most of the gardens. Community spirit was also revealed to be essential to garden sustainability. The learning curve was also highlighted as the greatest obstacle to maintaining a garden. However the extent to which environmentalism factors into community gardens is a topic that may warrant future study.

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## **Advice to Future Honors Students**

ESF is a very diverse community of students, even though sometimes it can feel like we are all of one mind. If you explore and talk to people from different majors and from different regions of the United States, you will find a huge diversity of opinions on even the simplest of environmental issues. My interest in the intersection of religion and environmentalism stems partly from my internship experience, but mainly from my many fascinating discussions with friends at ESF who struggle to balance their religious beliefs and scientific studies.

Though it is easy and sometimes even fun to argue, the trick is to listen, accept and discuss. You will get so much more out of your time at ESF and out of life if you keep an open mind, regardless of how convinced you are of a particular view. Because, in the end we are a community which aims to find solutions, not just change opinions. Shifting the way people think requires one to first understand how the other side thinks. But to understand that you have to be willing to at least for a short time, believe as they do. I have personally been greatly influenced and inspired by the work of the 18<sup>th</sup> century romantic poet, John Keats and I would strongly recommend that future students examine and consider his explanation of “Negative Capability” which much more eloquently elucidates the mindset I encourage all environmentalists to adopt.

However, the other point I must make here is the importance of getting out and interacting with the subject of your study. It is easy to get caught in a laboratory, or between the pages of a book when the real animal or phenomenon you are examining exists right outside your window. By seeing it for yourself, you will understand it so much better and be so very much more passionate in your examination of it, because in the end it is passion that drives everything truly worth doing.

**Acknowledgements**

Special thanks to Dr. Andrea Feldpausch-Parker for her guidance throughout this process, for being patient when my thoughts were scattered and understanding when I confused myself. Thank you also to Becki Walker for going above and beyond in her edits and making sure my work really was honors quality. Thanks also to Michelle Blankas for slogging through the raw data and helping me to refine my coding even though she had a million other things on her plate. And lastly, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge all those who volunteered their time and contributed their experiences in the interview process; this study was inspired by your ideas and nourished by your experiences.

## INTRODUCTION

### *Background*

Nineteenth century sociologist and philosopher Émile Durkheim argued that at its core, religion is social (Anderson, 2012, p. 20). He explained religion as “beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church” (Anderson, 2012, p. 20). Franz Boas, the renowned German-American anthropologist and a contemporary of Durkheim wrote a great deal about religion and its function in human society. Boas described religion as a “realm where people communicated their deepest fears, highest ideals and morals and most brilliant artistic creations” (Anderson, 2012, p. 15). What Boas realized was that though a single religion can play the same role in numerous cultures across the globe, it can also occupy a plethora of cultural niches. For example, though Catholicism in the United States is by most observed on Sundays and Holidays, in many European countries it is deeply ingrained in everyday life, influencing music and fashion as well as government and politics. However, this is true on the individual level as well. Though two people may identify as members of the same religion, the way they interpret the religion and integrate their faith in their lives can be completely different. For one, religion may serve to answer the larger cosmic questions, while for the other faith may serve as a means to connect him with the community and socialize with like-minded people. Within a culture, religion can serve to “integrate the community, tie it to its agricultural and hunting systems, and manage resources” (Anderson, 2012, p. 14). Outside of a culture however, religion can connect people both through a shared ideology and through the projects with which they get involved and organizations with which they partner.

A community garden is any piece of land cultivated communally by a group of people (Eat Smart Move More, 2007, p. 2). They can be as small as a one-car garage or as large as a farm, each is unique to the community that develops it. They also have a variety of governance structures – in some, each person tends their own plot while in others members tend the whole garden as a group. Community gardens today are found in parks, at schools, abandoned urban lots and increasingly in places of worship (Eat Smart Move More, 2007, p. 2). At their core though, just as Boas and Durkheim described religion to be, community gardens are about the social experience. “There is evidence that community gardens benefit the psychological well-being and social well-being of gardeners and local residents” (Armstrong, 2000). Gardens bring people together to grow food for themselves, their friends and often in the case of religiously affiliated gardens, for the less fortunate (Armstrong, 2000). The topic of this paper however is faith-based community gardens, which are those operated by a particular religious community. They are often also located on property owned by that religious community, but it is not always the case (Eat Smart Move More, 2007, p. 2).

### *History*

To an extent, many modern environmental issues are connected to the ancient biblical divide within the Judeo-Christian faiths between those who see humans as citizens of the land and those that see themselves as stewards of it (Boyd, 1999, p. 36). This largely stems from the differing interpretations of Genesis 1:26, “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth and over all the creatures that move along the ground’” (Callicott, 1994). The stewardship interpretation states that man was created



first and all else was created in service of man, however man is therein responsible for the rest of creation (Callicott, 1994). The citizenship perspective states that man was created last and is therefore part of nature and thus may utilize resources as he wishes, but still act as a “good citizen” and not exploit them (Callicott, 1994). When speaking to people within these religious communities about environmental concerns, it quickly becomes evident which camp they belong to. Neither of these interpretations entirely defines a person’s relationship with the environment, but in a larger sense, it influences how they interact with it and the responsibility they feel for it. Adam Smith wrote about this relationship in *The Wealth of Nations*. In the book, he describes what he calls a “moral framework” as necessary component of a well-functioning economic and political system, a framework which involved religion (Anderson, 2012, p. 11). He believed that religion evolved along with economy and the two complemented one another quite organically as religion helped to build and sustain a moralistic and organized society (Anderson, 2012, p. 11). In the same way, this study examines how religion can serve as an impetus in the context of community agriculture.

There is certainly some opposition to the thesis that religiosity can increase environmental behavior such as community gardening. One study found that a “dominate the earth” mentality was correlated with practitioners of the Christian faith being less likely to perceive pollutants as a threat and generally less supportive of protecting the environment (Boyd, 1999, p. 36). Additionally, the study found that demography seriously impacts environmental beliefs and levels of engagement among communities of faith, so there is no consistent engagement with the issues (Boyd, 1999, p. 40). Michelle Obama, First Lady of the United States stated in her recent “Let’s Move” campaign to

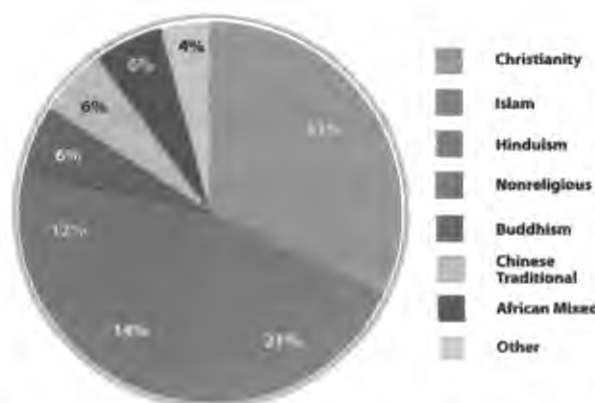
fight obesity that “when it comes to tackling childhood obesity... our faith-based and community organizations have a critical role to play” (US HHS, 2014, p. 2). She continued on, speaking directly to those organizations stating “your organizations are trusted leaders in your community, which makes you well-positioned to take action. Children learn many lessons about healthy living and well-being in faith- and community-based settings that set the foundation for their lifestyles as adults” (US HHS, 2014, p. 4). The First Lady is among many who recognize that gardens are a place where people can develop both community and spirituality. A Christian scholar wrote a paper contending that industrialism has caused Americans to lose their connection with nature and with God. He argues that “Nature, not Christ, is the primary mediator between God and humankind” (Hardy, 2009, p. 454). He explains that it is his belief that those who seek to be closer to God should not spend all their time inside of churches, but rather outdoors in the temple of nature (Hardy, 2009, p. 454). George Cadbury, of the Cadbury Chocolate Company, wrote:

“Through my experience among the back streets of Birmingham I have been brought to the conclusion that it is impossible to raise a nation, morally, physically, and spiritually in such surroundings, and that the only effective way to bring men out of the cities into the country was to give every man his garden where he can come into touch with nature and thus know more of nature’s God” (as cited in Hardy, 2009, p. 454).

Cadbury thus explains that more generally speaking, for those who seek a religious experience, or a feeling of purity, they must turn to nature and explore the “original” God.

### *The Evolution of Religion*

Some religions have clear connections to other faiths, while the parallels between others are more nuanced. The three major world religions (Judaism, Christianity, and



**Fig 1: Comparison of Practitioners of Major World Religions**

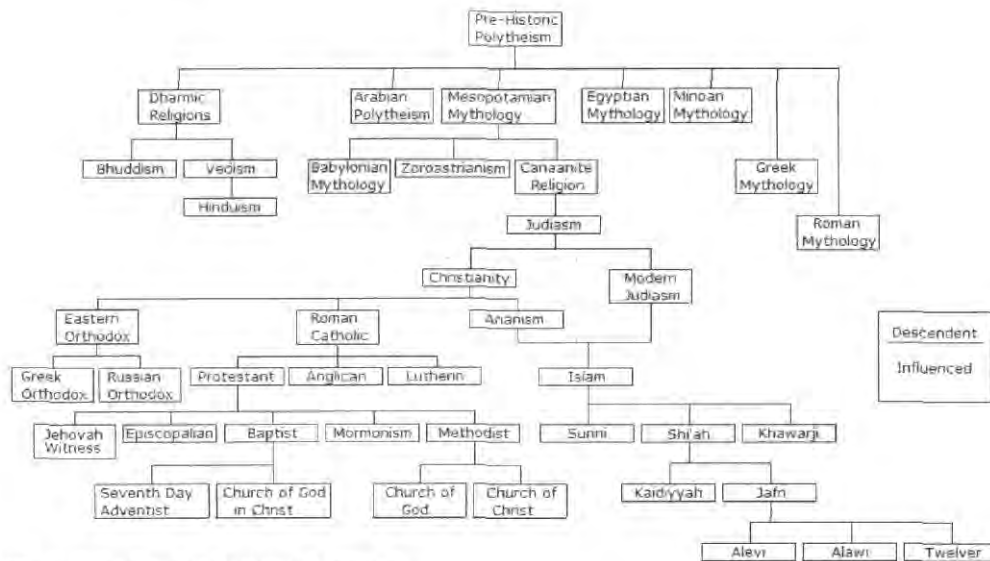
Berglee, R. (2012). *World regional geography: People, places, and globalization* (1.0th ed.). Morehead, Kentucky: Flat World doi-978-1-4533-7978-8

Islam) however have been as such for a long time and continue to influence the social, political and economic aspects of life (Fig 1). The history of religion is a fascinating topic which can be broken down many times and in many different ways (Fig. 2). Theologians and philosophers have debated for centuries

whether the origin of religion is natural or transcendental. The naturalistic perspective is that “religion is natural...it is a human phenomenon composed of events, organisms, objects, structures, patterns, and the like that all obey the laws of physics or biology, and hence do not involve miracles” (Anghel, 2013). The transcendentalist perspective is that “religion is a response to, or an effect of, something nonhuman or superhuman” (Anghel, 2013). This debate however is in the grander scheme quite recent; it was not until the Scientific Revolution in the seventeenth century that anyone even challenged the transcendentalist notion (Anghel, 2013). With the discovery that the earth was not the center of the universe, it became apparent to the faithful that “that the universe had not been created with man in mind” (Anghel, 2013). This shifted not only the way people thought about the universe, but also how they understood their place in it.

One can argue that it was this shift that made the entire environmental movement possible. “Natural history began to broaden its meaning...trying to establish natural connections between phenomena, connections that did not involve a supernatural force” (Anghel, 2013). People began to wonder if they needed to be more careful in their

treatment of the earth rather than relying on God to assure their needs were always met. Faith-based gardens each make peace with this dichotomy in different ways. Most believe the earth to be a gift of God, but also understand themselves to be stewards and imbued with the responsibility to care for what they have been given and make the best use of its resources (Callicott, 1994).



**Fig 2: Evolution of Religion Diagram**

Crossing Styx. (2015). *Religion family tree religion family tree*

### *Project Intent*

E.O. Wilson spoke a few years ago on the topic of religion and environment and said “I think the usual approach of secular science is to...not expect anything from religious believers or at least religious thinkers. But I've taken precisely the opposite approach” (Wilson, E. O., 2006, p. 1). The fact that religious communities often have different ways of doing things than the greater community makes them not outliers, but rather an invaluable source of wisdom and inspiration. For the purposes of this examination, the uniqueness and commitment to practice which characterize communities of faith make them an untapped potentially invaluable source of information about how

to improve and maintain the growing garden movement. Community gardens are a distinct and significant component of the current environmental movement especially in urban areas (Garreau, 2011). However over time many of them suffer from insufficient support and/or neglect (Fulford & Thompson, 2013).

The objective of this investigation was to investigate the common concerns of faith-based community gardens as well as how they handled them. This investigation sought to discover specific gardening techniques utilized in faith-based gardens which could be applied ubiquitously to any of the growing community gardens throughout the western world. The ultimate goal is thus to help make community gardens, both faith-based and secular more successful and sustainable by sharing fruitful ideas and discoveries. The research in this paper is guided by three key questions: (1) What can be learned from faith-based community gardens? (2) Which aspects of religious institutions make them conducive to agricultural projects/ are religion and gardening naturally connected? (3) Is faith-based agriculture a unique environmental movement?

Lovelock wrote that all humans have “an evolutionary desire to have ideology, to justify their actions (Garreau, 2011, p. 13). As such there are some who now consider environmentalism to be its own ideology, its own religion (Garreau, 2011, p. 13). As such, the work this project has done, and the future research it proposes could in a way be construed as an interfaith initiative. Science fiction writer, Michael Crichton wrote that environmentalism has become “the religion of choice for urban atheists” (qtd. in Garreau, 2011, p. 9). Crichton elucidates:

“There's an initial Eden, a paradise, a state of grace and unity with nature, there's a fall from grace into a state of pollution as a result of eating from the tree of knowledge, and as a result of our actions there is a judgment day coming for us all. We are all energy sinners, doomed to die, unless we seek salvation, which is now called sustainability. Sustainability is salvation in the church of the environment” (as cited in Garreau, 2011, p. 9).

This line of thought is now referred to amongst academics as “Ecotheology” (Garreau, 2011, p. 9). However, despite obtaining its own designation, the new spirituality still seems to be developing in tandem with the Judeo-Christian faiths from which it sprung. *In the seventies, Pope John Paul II pushed a stewardship interpretation and even went so far as to designate Francis of Assisi the patron saint of ecologists.* At present, integrating environmental issues in their work is becoming a common trend, especially among aging congregations looking to engage younger parishioners. The current Pope, Pope Francis has even described climate action as a moral imperative (Reese, 2015). In exchange, those movements are receiving physical and financial support for their projects from their respective faith associations (Garreau, 2011, p. 10).

## METHODS

### *Supporting Theory*

I took an approach based on grounded theory to address the research questions (See Appendix A for codebook). In grounded theory, codes are not tested by data but rather “developed inductively from data” and perpetually refined and modified throughout the study in constant comparison as more data is collected (Higginbottom & Lauridsen, 2014). *Grounded theory is essentially a “cyclical process of data collection, coding, analysis, writing design and theoretical categorization”* (Appendix B) (Higginbottom & Lauridsen, 2014). The intention is for the investigator to learn as they conduct their research and allow the process to inform the analysis. Grounded theory is the method of choice for many researchers in the social sciences who are investigating topics with limited previous literature. It examines “what happens in a social context to uncover patterns in social life of which participants might or might not be aware”



(Engward, 2013). In grounded theory coding is usually done in three stages: (1) the researcher generates initial ideas, (2) central and recurring codes are selected as the investigation is underway and (3) codes are refined in order to draw conclusions (Engward, 2013).

There are however different interpretations of grounded theory. Glaser and Strauss developed the original model in the 1960s, but this study leans more towards Charmaz's Constructivist model developed in the 1990s (Hall et al., 2013). This approach is based on the notion that it is impossible for the researcher to be entirely objective in their data collection and analysis. This interpretation postulates that "researchers' findings are not representative of a true, discoverable reality but are interpretations of multiple realities mutually constructed by the researcher and the researched" (Higginbottom & Lauridsen, 2014). In effect, it is understood that throughout the research process, the investigator will continually interpret the data according to their "perspectives, privileges, positions, interactions and geographical locations" (Charmaz 2009). However, this passage of information through the lens of the analyst does not discredit the results; it is simply a part of the process. In theory, as more studies are done on the topic, this will help to create a broader understanding of the subject matter and veritable truths will be extracted through literature review.

In the grander scheme of social science research, qualitative research is relatively new, having only been used for the last 75 years. However, it has become an essential tool in the social sciences, media and even politics as it promotes deviations and creative approaches. Qualitative research methods are "preferable when the investigation is oriented to determine motivation, perceptions or beliefs (Hooper, 2011). Interviewing is

one of the most common methods of qualitative data collection as it allows people to share their experiences and opinions. Interviews collect data directly from the source. They also allow people to speak openly and thus serve as a method of investigating the specific area of research as well as exploring the topic as a whole. Interviews are especially useful to address “sensitive topics that people might be reluctant to discuss in a group.” It is the preferred method in an investigative study such as this one because it assures that subjects are comfortable and relaxed and more likely to share their true opinions on the subject (Milena et al., 2008).

### *Description of Methodology*

Interviews were conducted with individuals associated and involved with faith-based community agriculture initiatives in New York City and Long Island, including members of the public and non-profits in the region. Interview subjects were selected based on their level of involvement and history of experience with their respective faith-based community garden. In each case, the selected individual was someone who was familiar not only with the operations of the garden, but also the history and original intent of the project. The list of potential interview candidates was compiled through personal networking and internet research. Internet research was conducted on two websites which listed over fifty current community gardens in the New York City/ Long Island area: The Long Island Interfaith Nutrition Network ([http:// the-inn.org](http://the-inn.org)) and the Long Island Community Agriculture Network (<http://www.lican.org>). The potential interviewees were then sent an email inviting them to participate in the study and a description of the project. If they consented, a time was established and they were interviewed via phone. Notes were recorded by hand and then later transcribed. A consent form also signed by



each participant and it was agreed that a copy of the final report would be sent to them if they desired it. An attempt was also made to vary the faiths associated with the gardens included in this project by reaching out to a diversity of organizations, so as to obtain as varied a sample as possible for analysis. Contact was then made via email and/or phone calls to request interviews. Twenty organizations were contacted and twelve consented to be involved, however one only responded after the data collection was complete, so eleven interviews were included in this study. If the individuals assented, they were emailed a full overview of the project and fact sheet as well as a consent form.

Participants were asked to answer seven interview questions by the researcher at the convenience of the interviewee (Appendix C). These questions were developed to explore the techniques and practices utilized by each garden to maintain and develop the projects. They were also intended to investigate the motivation of those involved with the gardens which was anticipated to be the driver for the gardens' respective levels of sustainability. The data was collected in the form of hand-written notes and typed transcriptions (Appendix D). Identifiers were later scrubbed for inclusion in the final document for publication to maintain the privacy of the participants.

The data was then coded on the sentence-level and analyzed using themes (Appendix B). Using the grounded theory approach, the themes emerged from the data through the analysis process (Appendix A). The data coding technique was then tested with the percent agreement method by a peer unconnected with the study. The peer was given two interview transcripts (20% the total number of transcripts), with all identifiers scrubbed as well as a blank coding scheme which they were asked to fill out with either 1 for present or 0 for absent. This test yielded 71% inter-coder reliability, a figure

calculated by how many sentences the peer and author were in agreement on out of the total number of sentences coded. Using the method of percent agreement “coefficients of .70 are appropriate in some exploratory studies for some indices” (Neuendorf, 2002). Thus, the coding technique was determined to be reliable for this investigative study. Conclusions were then drawn based on the propensity of the themes revealed through coding in the interview transcripts.

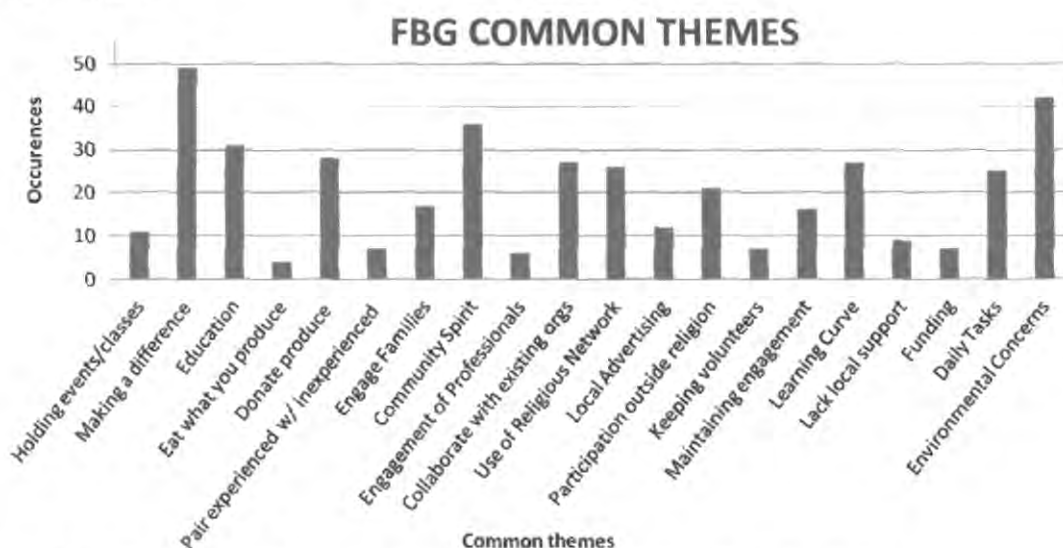
This research was approved by the Syracuse University Internal Review Board; the protocol number is 14-086. The IRB determined the research would be Exempt as it falls within the one or more of the five exempt categories allowed by the organization and it meets the organization’s ethical standards.

## RESULTS

Eleven interviews were conducted in total. The respective faith associations were as follows: 8 Christianity (2 Catholicism and 6 Catholic Denominations: Lutheran, Protestant, and Anglican), 1 Hinduism, 1 Unitarian Universalist, 1 Judaism.

The theme with the most mentions was a “Feeling of Making a Difference” with 49 mentions throughout the interviews (An example of a statement coded with this theme: “I also wanted to beautify the community and I thought a garden was a great way to do that”). The second most common theme was “Environmental Concerns and Ethics” with 42 mentions (ex: “The real problem though is that the pollution continues.”). Also commonly discussed were the categories of: “Education” with 31 mentions (ex: “the students I have worked with at this garden are always asking questions.”), “Community Spirit” with 36 mentions (ex: “The project brought the community closer together because everyone was working together on a common goal.”), “Donate Produce” with 28

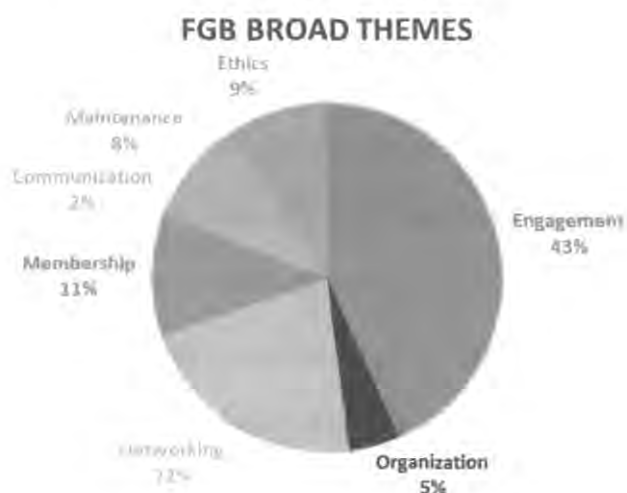
mentions (ex: “We have also contributed a great deal to the food pantry.”). The categories which received the fewest mentions were “Consistent Communication” with 3 mentions, “Creation of a Planning Board” with 2 mentions, “Similar Ideology within the Group” with 3 mentions and “Space Concerns” with 2 mentions. The concern however which was raised most frequently was the “Learning Curve” mentioned 27 times in the transcripts (ex: “Planting and figuring out how to make the garden work was hard at the beginning.”).



**Fig 3: Graph of number of times common themes were mentioned in interviews**

The interviews were coded using seven broad themes as well as the aforementioned more specific themes (Fig. 4). Looking just at the broader categories, “Engagement” was by and large the most prevalent theme (ex: “Engaging younger people was also not easy, but we got some kids involved with their parents and that was great.”). The second most commonly mentioned was “Networking” (with other gardens, environmental organizations and religious organizations), with about half the mentions as “Engagement” (ex: “We also work with gardeners at a church down the road.”).

It is also worth noting that member retention was not a common concern amongst those interviewed for this study. In fact within this group, more people had trouble maintaining engagement during the growing season than between seasons. This suggests that the gardens which participated in this study were in fact successful and thus valid sources of information about long-term sustainability.



**Fig 4: Graph of percentage of times broad themes were mentioned in interviews**

## DISCUSSION

### *Implications for non-faith-based community gardens*

This study found that for many people involved with faith-based community gardens, the feeling of making a difference was paramount in their decision to become and remain involved with their respective projects. The discussion of this aspect of community gardens in fact far outweighed the notion of being able to grow and consume what one had produced. One interviewee stated “It is always frustrating and difficult, but it is also wonderfully fulfilling and rewarding.” Thus, the findings suggest that it is not as much the physical benefits of gardening, but rather the social benefits that bring in new members and retain old ones. By having that sense of giving back and community

service, those involved feel they are part of something larger and feel a responsibility to commit not just to the project, but to the community and those to whom the produce is going. Thus it seems to become more than a garden; it becomes a way to give back which is already a component of many religious belief systems. This understanding can be applied to non-faith-based gardens in the sense that it may benefit the project more to put funds and efforts into building a community and strengthening the bonds between participants than to devote those resources towards developing the garden itself. This can take the form of events like potlucks and barbeques or even educational programs.

Education was also found to be highly influential in retaining members. One garden manager reported that they use “info panels placed around the garden to inform visitors about the butterflies, bees, birds and other wildlife in the garden; that way we teach people in the community about nature.” Another manager stated that “I learned how much kids want to learn about nature and gardening,” a sentiment echoed by a few of those interviewed. The findings of this study suggest that to a large extent, new garden managers assume people and especially children do not possess a great interest in learning, however those who have a plethora of experience report that the opportunity to learn is one of the largest draws for participants, especially youth.

On the other hand, for new garden managers, the learning curve was revealed to be the greatest obstacle. For example, one interviewee stated “I had to learn which plants work well in the shade or sun or ambient light.” The learning curve may be the greatest obstacle because it takes years of experience with a specific plot to understand the natural system and how to best work in that area. It also takes time to find the best tools, develop a seasonal system and the best plant varieties for the region. One Interviewee explained

that in the past regional and biological knowledge was passed down through culture, but in most urban settings this knowledge has been lost and people have to discover those things for themselves over time. She went on to state “I also noticed that we had a large immigrant population in the area and I wanted to tap into that ancient knowledge and help continue those traditions that they knew from home. People teach me all the time and I love seeing them reacquaint themselves with the history and culture of their homeland in the big city.” Nearly all the garden heads interviewed lacked any experience with gardening when they began and claimed they are still learning now regardless of how many years they had already been involved with their projects. Through their testimonies, the majority of the garden leaders who participated in this study revealed that they are passionate about learning and tend to view the challenges they face as learning opportunities. They also look at their support team (composed of the committed members of the garden) as a source of information and get excited when they learn something new and want to share it with others. In short, successful gardens have humble, curious leaders.

### *Collaborations*

Along with the idea of community, the successful gardens take suggestions and are always open to new ideas. Members feel they are part of a team and contribute to both the physical maintenance of the garden and the structure of it. Leaders of such gardens encourage their members to be involved in every stage and teach as well as learn from other members and leaders. Said one interviewee, “It has been a learning experience for all involved, it is just so much more than you could imagine.” As such, family involvement was also revealed to be important because there are roles for everyone and



they can teach one another; plus there is always someone to carry it on. Also, young families tend to have a large local network that they can share the project with and help the garden gain new members. Many of the garden leaders interviewed in this study reported that involving families was not only a goal, but a necessity because it assured that the garden would be taken care of by someone, even if the whole family could not be there at once. One leader who was planning on retiring reported that, "Next year they will be willing to take over actually as a lot of the same families that started with me are really involved now," explaining that those who will take over for her are part of families that have become connected with and invested in the project.

Additionally, the gardens which participated in this study reported that they collaborate with other gardens and organizations within and outside their cultural/religious circles. One garden manager stated that "Because the garden is shared, we have also learned from the Korean and Chinese communities who share their knowledge with us." Though many of them began by connecting through religious organizations, the successful gardens (which had been in existence for more than a year and continue to grow and thrive) reached out and developed interfaith networks as well as connections with other non-religiously affiliated gardens, environmental organizations, government bodies and food pantries.

### *Existing Literature*

These findings are consistent with the existing literature on modern community gardens. There is little available literature on specifically faith-based gardens, but a great deal of research has been conducted on community gardens as a movement and as a way to revitalize urban areas. A 2013 article published in the *Journal of Ecological*

Anthropology found that "social motivation - the chance to talk to other gardeners - was the second highest ranked reason" for people to participate in community gardens, with the number one reason being "enjoyment" (Meadow, 2013). The study also found that one of the most successful aspects of community gardens is "the creation of opportunities for a diverse cross-section of the community to develop personal relationships". A similar study conducted in Canada found that community gardens in urban areas allow for "youth empowerment and community revitalization." Additionally participants in the study reported feeling "a strong sense of individual pride and accomplishment gained by the work, but also a sense of belonging" (Fulford, 2013).

#### *Future Studies*

Solidarity and building a community were essential to every single project - in gardens that were 100 acres, to the smallest that was only 400 square feet. Contrary to what I expected to find, solidarity did not depend on the religious community, though in many cases it sprung from it. Additionally, most of the gardens wanted to involve the community and many had active campaigns to involve members of the larger community. Thus, a very fascinating and illuminating study could certainly be done on the dynamic between these collaborating communities. Most notably, much could be learned from communities of faith that operate gardens in the same vicinity and manage to not only coexist, but also learn from one another.

The environmental question became one of the most fascinating of this study because of the polarity of responses. While some were adamant about their commitment to the environment, others completely avoided the question and simply discussed the generally positive impact their project has had on the community. There was almost a note of



discomfort or even fear in some of the responses as people struggled to formulate a response. Further investigative studies could discover a great deal from exploring public conceptions and potentially misconceptions about environmentalism in the modern era. This could take the form of either interviews or written surveys directed at people who are uninvolved with any environmental organizations which would prompt subjects to speak to their understanding of the movement as well as the connotation of the term. Such an investigation could yield significant benefits for community gardens as well as the environmental movement as a whole, by helping to understand what the public expects of environmentalists and how we could perhaps shift those expectations for the better.

## CONCLUSION

### *General Findings*

The study found that members highlighted a feeling of making a difference and performing some level of community service as a key component of most of the gardens. In fact, far more gardens donated their produce than consumed it themselves, which may have partly been religiously motivated as charity is a key component of many faiths. Community spirit was also revealed to be essential to garden sustainability and though many of them began within religious networks, they all had already reached out or had plans to connect with non-religiously affiliated organizations. The learning curve was also highlighted as the greatest obstacle to maintaining a garden. But this analysis found that this was largely overcome by leaders who embraced these learning opportunities and sought to share new information with their members. However the extent to which environmentalism factors into community gardens is a topic that may warrant future

study, as the interviewees expressed a spectrum of emotions about being associated with the environmental movement.

### *Practical Implications*

Simply starting a community garden at a place of worship can serve as both a community service project and as a way to strengthen the bonds within a religious community. The service aspect can be a donation of produce, beautification of the area, or even education as members learn about food and healthy eating. “More than 120 million people in the United States attend religious services regularly, providing opportunities for sharing information and organizing initiatives to combat malnutrition and obesity. Community-based nonprofit and volunteer-driven organizations are also well-positioned to address the challenge of obesity among children and youth” (US HHS, 2014, p. 11). It is also important to note, however, that most gardens start small, with a relatively inexperienced leadership and it does not take much to begin. “You don’t have to do everything...You can build on success and choose more steps from the menu if you want to expand your efforts” (US HHS, 2014, p. 11). One interviewee remarked that “It’s important to get the “right type” of people for each project, you need people with both the time and skill to handle the job.” Not everyone has to participate in every task, part of the community aspect of a garden is that everyone brings a different skill set and knowledge base to the table. Plus, in most urban settings in the United States there are already many preexisting community gardens, environmental groups and even government programs like the First Lady’s “Let’s Move” campaign that will help young gardens get on their feet and begin to truly flourish.

### *Looking to the Future*

Callicott (1994) believed that common environmental threats inherent in each culture and religion can be employed to unify people behind the environmental movement. E. O. Wilson similarly calls for “an alliance of science and religion in this area” (2006). Though this study specifically targeted faith-based gardens, it found that not one of those was completely unconnected with gardens of other faiths or non-faith based organizations. It is difficult to operate in American society without associating with those of different faiths and thus imperative that the next steps be taken towards collaboration. One interviewee stated that “We have shown that working together, a small group can make a big difference.” There are so many small groups who may worship in different ways, but believe the same essential things about the natural world. Gardens could in this way serve as a bridge between different faith communities, allowing people to share knowledge and exchange ideas about how to protect and embrace nature in the urban setting.

E.O. Wilson also said that “there is abundant evidence that human beings need nature. They need wild environments; they need at least pastoral environments duplicating the early habitats of human beings in order to develop fully as people” (2006). Garden work and the feeling of being in a garden appeal to many people, especially those who live in urban areas and are used to spending much of their time indoors. Perhaps community gardens are the perfect place to begin building relationships between faiths and find such common threads. Some of the gardens involved with this project are certainly doing that both consciously and unconsciously. Much of environmental work lately has involved recognizing and remedying damage that humans

have caused. As a result there is a general view of people as the enemy of nature.

However, Garreau writes to the contrary that "our evolution of intelligence is something of immense value to the planet. It could make, eventually, part of it, an intelligent planet.

More able to deal with problems like incoming asteroids, volcanic outbursts and so on.

So I look on us as highly beneficial and therefore certainly worth saving" (2011, p. 13).

By looking at one another as valuable sources of accumulated wisdom and making use of the cultural and scientific knowledge each group possesses, human beings can help to make both their gardens and their lifestyles more sustainable. Through collaboration and *interfaith initiatives*, we can learn from one another and build healthier, more beautiful planet for everyone.

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## Appendix A

### **Interview Coding Scheme - Common Themes**

#### **SUGGESTIONS FOR SUSTAINABILITY**

##### **Engagement**

- Holding events and classes at the garden
  - Interviewee specifies that an event was held at the garden with the purpose of uniting and/ or educating the group
- Feeling of making a difference/ making a contribution/ filling a need
  - Interviewee mentions that they are motivated by the belief that they are making a necessary contribution to the community
- Education
  - Interviewee discusses ways that they educate their members either individually or as a group
- Eat what you produce
  - Interviewee states that the members consume some portion of what they grow in the garden
- Donating produce
  - Interviewee states that some portion of the food produced by the garden is given away free of charge to an individual in need or a charitable organization
- Pair inexperienced with experienced gardeners
  - Interviewee mentions an initiative to partner experienced and inexperienced gardeners with one another to help new members acclimate/ learn
- Engage Families
  - Interviewee states that they in one way or another engage families as a whole, not just individuals, regardless of how many plots they have
- Community Spirit/ Feeling of Solidarity
  - Interviewee discusses that their members express a feeling of solidarity with the group and feel connected to the people, not just the project
- Connect with nature
  - Interviewee mentions that members use participation in the garden as a means of communing/ connecting with the natural environment
- Encourage inexperienced to participate
  - Interviewee states that they encourage all people to help in their garden, not just those who have prior experience with or knowledge of gardening

## Organization

- Having a system that holds people accountable
  - Interviewee mentions that they have in place a means of holding members accountable if they do not adequately contribute to the garden or care for their plot
- Assigned Roles
  - Interviewee states that various members of the garden have specified roles that they play in the maintenance or administration of the garden
- Usage of consistent email communication e.g. updates, newsletters, notifications
  - Interviewee states that the administrative members of the garden use various means of written communication consistently to keep members engaged
- Planning Board
  - Interviewee states that the garden is administered by a specific group of members who make decisions for the rest of the group and plan for the next season
- Similar Ideology
  - Interviewee discusses that all members possess a similar way of thinking which they either seek in new members or are expected to gain from participating in the project

## Networking

- Engagement of Professionals e.g. master gardener, master composter, apothecary
  - Interviewee mentions that professionals in the fields relating to gardening are occasionally or regularly brought in to educate the group
- Establish connections with existing organizations and gardens
  - Interviewee states that the garden has and/ or is working to connect with other local gardens or similar organizations to solicit donations and advice
- Use of Religious Network
  - Interviewee states that they make use of other organizations within their community of faith for assistance or donations
- Local advertising/ word of mouth
  - Interviewee discusses that they recruit members through local advertising in newspapers/ flyers or by word of mouth, through existing members
- Participation outside religious community
  - Interviewee mentions that there are members of their garden that do not belong to the dominant faith community of the garden
- Leadership by individual already known in community



- Interviewee states that garden is lead by an individual who previously possessed some level of notoriety or power within the community

## COMMON CONCERNS

### Membership

- Keeping volunteers for more than a season
  - Interviewee states that their garden struggles to get members to return for more than a single growing season
- Maintaining engagement throughout the season
  - Interviewee states that they have trouble keeping members engaged throughout the season and making them maintain their respective plots
- Learning Curve
  - Interviewee states that learning how to make the best use of the environment in which their garden is located or generally how to grow plants is a deterrent for administrators and/ or members

### Communication

- Residential areas, people complain/ don't support
  - Interviewee states that residents of the area in which the garden is located have opposed the garden and/ or do not show enough support for the garden to adequately maintain the project

### Maintenance

- Funding
  - Interviewee states that a lack of financial support has and/ or continues to inhibit the development of their garden project
- Space
  - Interviewee states that a lack of physical space has and/ or continues to inhibit the development of their garden project
- Daily tasks/ prep work
  - Interviewee states that an overwhelming amount of daily work or required preparation has and/ or continues to inhibit the development of their garden project

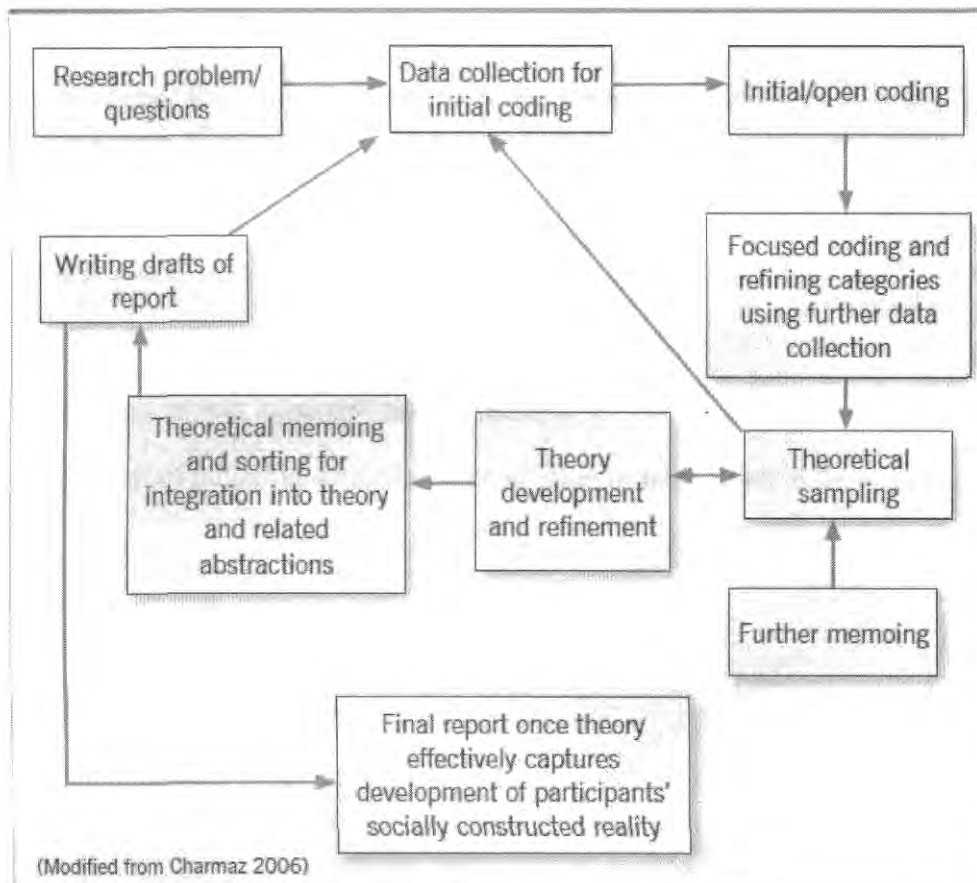
### Ethics

- Environmental concerns
  - Interviewee discusses environmental or environmental ethical concerns that has and/ or continues to inhibit the development of their garden project



## Appendix B

### Constructivist Grounded Theory Diagram



Higginbottom, G., & Lauridsen, E. I. (2014). The roots and development of constructivist grounded theory. *Nurse Researcher*, 21(5), 8-13.  
doi:10.7748/nr.21.5.8.e1208

### Appendix C

#### **FBG Interview Questions**

1. What have you learned from your experiences with your faith-based agriculture?
2. What have been the major opportunities and/or challenges faced in establishing/ coordinating your faith-based garden?
3. What was your motivation for beginning/ becoming involved with this project?
4. Who is primarily involved with your project?
5. Does participation extend outside your religious group?
6. How has your project impacted the community?
7. Do you see your project as an environmental effort or maybe part of the environmental movement? Please explain.

## Appendix D

### **FBG Interview Transcripts**

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#### **#1 Lutheranism, Christianity**

1. What have you learned from your experiences with your faith-based agriculture?

We donate all of our produce. Organizing people is like trying to nail jell-o to the wall. It is always frustrating and difficult, but it is also wonderfully fulfilling and rewarding. It is often the last people you expect who come through and participate. It's great to work with people who have the same ideals. There are always ups and downs.

2. What have been the major opportunities and/or challenges faced in establishing/ coordinating your faith-based garden?

It's important to get the "right type" of people for each project, you need people with both the time and skill to handle the job. Many people are willing, but not able. You need the right knowledge and physicality.

3. What was your motivation for beginning/ becoming involved with this project?

I wanted to help beautify the neighborhood, reach out to people in need and give back. I also saw that there was this large plot of land that was completely overgrown.

4. Who is primarily involved with your project?

It is mostly people within the congregation, but it is open to everyone.

5. Does participation extend outside your religious group?

We have featured an ad in the local paper in an attempt to bring other people in. Some of the food pantry people help as well.

6. How has your project impacted the community?

The project has shown the community that we care about people outside the church circle. We have also contributed a great deal to the food pantry. We have shown that working together, a small group can make a big difference. We also reach people on an immediate level because they interact with the garden as it grows and then get to eat what they produce.

7. Do you see your project as an environmental effort or maybe part of the environmental movement? Please explain.

Not at the start; It is primarily an outreach project, however when we combined with the town, yes. It is not officially organic, but we don't use chemicals. We do compost and the kids help, it's not our main focus though. We want people to experience the outdoor environment, eat healthy food and form a connection with nature. Plus we donate healthy food to those in need.

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## *#2 Lutheranism, Christianity*

### 1. What have you learned from your experiences with your faith-based agriculture?

It is very difficult to make a garden. You have to advocate for yourself. But, people do really like to help with this kind of project. As soon as you get it started, everyone jumps on the bandwagon and wants to help.

### 2. What have been the major opportunities and/or challenges faced in establishing/ coordinating your faith-based garden?

Planting and figuring out how to make the garden work was hard at the beginning. Engaging younger people was also not easy, but we got some kids involved with their parents and that was great. I had the chance to educate the kids and that was awesome. For me though, it was also a challenge to manage my time. There are specific seasons for planting and people are not always available to help at the same time, so I had to be on top of my schedule all the time.

### 3. What was your motivation for beginning/ becoming involved with this project?

The site at my church used to be a garden, but it was old and dilapidated. I wanted to make it into a garden again that everyone could enjoy. I also have a personal love of the outdoors and exploring nature. I wanted to share that with my community. I also had a lot of fun planting and working with kids. I also wanted to beautify the community and I thought a garden was a great way to do that.

### 4. Who is primarily involved with your project?

Well, my project first had to be approved by the Pastor and Church board, so after they did that the Pastor and the church director really helped me recruit other members to help and even helped themselves. My family was also really involved and my friends came out to help too.

### 5. Does participation extend outside your religious group?

Most of our helpers are from the church, but as I said, some of my friends have been really helpful as well.

### 6. How has your project impacted the community?

The church community has been impacted. The project helped bring people together and the butterfly release we did was a great event that gathered people together who don't usually meet. There are plenty of people who see each other all the time, but we never actually get together in one place, so that was pretty nice to see everybody out in the garden together. The summer camp at the church has also incorporated the garden maintenance into their program so I hope that will keep it ongoing and sustainable.

7. Do you see your project as an environmental effort or maybe part of the environmental movement? Please explain.

Yes, I do, but it is not a large-scale contribution. To me the environmental part is more of an idea that sparks other people to get more involved, to pick up garbage or plant a tree. I kind of want this garden to inspire people to get more involved and go the extra mile for other people in their community.

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### #3 Protestantism, Christianity

1. What have you learned from your experiences with your faith-based agriculture?

Well first off, I learned a lot about the history of my community. The cemetery next to the church actually has people in it from over 100 years ago, which is so fascinating to me. There also used to be a mission house here in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Today though, our organization is a grassroots effort which is making use of unused land which the church had agreed to let us use. We have a container vegetable garden and donate produce to the church community and a local meal program. The rain garden is in its second year and we are learning to make the best use of the space we have. I had to learn which plants work well in the shade or sun or ambient light. The area is only 400 square feet. There is also a missionary house next to the church and the folks who stay there always have interest in the garden.

2. What have been the major opportunities and/or challenges faced in establishing/ coordinating your faith-based garden?

When we started the soil was actually very toxic, filled with all sorts of heavy metals and other terrible things. So, we built raised beds and filled them with our own soil and compost from the compost project we have here at the church. The real problem though is that the pollution continues. Lucky for us, the church enclave protects our garden. The volunteers from the community are always changing. The church also controls access to the garden, so people can't always get in when they want to, there's limited access.

3. What was your motivation for beginning/ becoming involved with this project?

I wanted to make an impact in my community and I already knew people in this organization and at the church, so that made it easier. I also noticed that we had a large immigrant population in the area and I wanted to tap into that ancient knowledge and

help continue those traditions that they knew from home. People teach me all the time and I love seeing them reacquaint themselves with the history and culture of their homeland in the big city.

4. Who is primarily involved with your project?

Mostly it is the church community, members of our organization and the missionary folks who help maintain the garden. But everyone who receives produce, participates in our workshops and stops by to talk helps us keep it going.

5. Does participation extend outside your religious group?

Yes, there are people who live nearby who are not members of the church, but are still interested in helping with the project, especially the immigrant community.

6. How has your project impacted the community?

We donate most of the produce and help to educate the community through our workshops. We also have a local apothecary who uses our herbs and trains apprentices as master herbalists. He also volunteers to teach workshops at the garden. We have 30 to 40 different herbs and have had over 140 people attend our workshops this year.

7. Do you see your project as an environmental effort or maybe part of the environmental movement? Please explain.

Definitely, we are cleaning the environment and teaching people that it *is* a big deal. We also collect rainwater in catchments to minimize our water usage. The plants also help to clean the air. In a city, having plants around also helps people's mental health. Plus, our compost program teaches people how to compost food. By doing that, we return methane to the soil and help to make the land healthy again.

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#### #4 Hinduism

1. What have you learned from your experiences with your faith-based agriculture?

I have learned a lot about gardening. I also met other people who share the same values. We have also done team building. Because the garden is shared, we have also learned from the Korean and Chinese communities who share their knowledge with us.

2. What have been the major opportunities and/or challenges faced in establishing/ coordinating your faith-based garden?

Physical labor, for me and finding others who can do the hard work. We also had to find the right tools which we didn't know at first. Some people were also busy and we had to wait and then it was too late to plant certain things.

3. What was your motivation for beginning/ becoming involved with this project?

We all do volunteer work for the temple, so this was a good project for me. Many other people were interested in helping with the project too.

4. Who is primarily involved with your project?

Volunteers share the tasks. One or two regular volunteers work every day. We use the flowers we grow in the temple, so some volunteers also collect them and bring them to the temple every day.

5. Does participation extend outside your religious group?

No, but the garden has gotten a different sort of people involved with the temple than who are involved with our other volunteer projects. It has a really positive influence on our temple community – it's a lot of work, but also a lot of bonding. We also have high school students who work with the seniors and help with the work, while also learning from the elders.

6. How has your project impacted the community?

It is an ongoing project and since the land belongs to the city and is only leased to us for gardening, we are helping beautify the area.

7. Do you see your project as an environmental effort or maybe part of the environmental movement? Please explain.

Yes, it is just mostly to provide flowers for the temple and bring members of the temple together, but we also use minimal fertilizers. We also have active beehives in the garden which is important because of the honey bee problem, which you may have heard about.

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#5 Protestantism, Christianity

1. What have you learned from your experiences with your faith-based agriculture?

This is our third year and we have about 20 people involved. It has been a learning experience for all involved, it is just so much more than you could imagine. You don't realize how disconnected you are from your food. People are also afraid of work. We first all had our own gardens, but there was so much inconsistency it was almost laughable. We were lucky to have the assistance of one resident who was very knowledgeable. I also learned just how much food you can grow in a 100 square foot garden, we generated over 500 lbs of food! We also learned that certain plans will take over the garden. Because of



one vine, we only produced half of what we had the year before. We also learned how to use organic growing methods, like using edible flowers and using other plants to manage pests. But I also found biblical truths in the garden about how we deal with the weeds of life.

2. What have been the major opportunities and/or challenges faced in establishing/ coordinating your faith-based garden?

Keeping volunteers engaged was definitely a challenge. Our goal was to give a consistent supply of produce to farm stands in poor communities. We found though that delivering food to stands consistently was a lot of work! People kind of lost steam after a while, so we plan to engage people more in the future.

3. What was your motivation for beginning/ becoming involved with this project?

Well, I wanted to lower my carbon footprint. We got solar panels at the church to save money and because the energy is renewable. I learned about what it means to generate your own energy locally. I also wanted to help local people and give them good food.

4. Who is primarily involved with your project?

Other church leaders and members. Some community residents also donated tools.

5. Does participation extend outside your religious group?

No, but I would like to expand more. We worried at first about people stealing food, but since it's on a busy street with cars and people all around, it hasn't been an issue.

6. How has your project impacted the community?

The garden is local and the food supply is for local families. It addresses social, political, economic and equity issues. I wanted to make an example for the community. People always know and ask about the garden which makes us visible.

7. Do you see your project as an environmental effort or maybe part of the environmental movement? Please explain.

Absolutely, not exclusively though, I know environmentalists like to own that sort of thing. I see our role as stewards. I put it in the broader context of exemplifying who we are as Christians and as human beings. I want to reduce our impact as part of a community, but the goal is really much bigger than that. At the moment the garden is not as robust as it could be, but we are still growing and learning.



1. What have you learned from your experiences with your faith-based agriculture?

I learned that a garden will grow. You can keep it organic, non-toxic and grown fruits and vegetables. More people will also come over the years.

2. What have been the major opportunities and/or challenges faced in establishing/ coordinating your faith-based garden?

We had a lot of flooding and so we had to level out the land more. We also hired a master gardener for one season to teach us the skills we needed to develop it more. We also set up a sign-in schedule to make people accountable. Members would call each other if they couldn't make it and had to be honest about their schedules. We also started a share-a-row program where one row of produce went to the gardener and the other row was donated. It was tough to also make sure we stayed organic with the seeds and compost we used. Everyone has to sign a formal document agreeing to use only organic and non-invasive plants. Making sure everything was watered was also rather difficult. We also have a well system on the property though, so that helped. Our organization has 100 acres of land certified by the National Wildlife Federation as a sanctuary, so the land use is restricted too. When we needed to buy things though, the committee paid for some of the things we needed.

3. What was your motivation for beginning/ becoming involved with this project?

Someone else was going to let it go and there was only a small committee maintaining it. I was no expert, I was just a home gardener, but I learned to garden and my interest grew more and more. I also liked the notion of donating the produce. There was one master on the committee who helped me a lot. I asked in an email who would like to donate some of their produce to a local food pantry which helps over 300 people in need. I wanted to give them produce that was healthy and not GM. We are aligned with GMO labeling and against Monsanto. We have vegetarian and vegan dinners once a year and help people get into healthy eating. We had a lot of new gardeners this year, some even want two plots next year. We paired experienced gardeners with inexperienced ones to teach and encourage them. We also have supervisors who keep on top of members and email them if work needs to be done in their plots.

4. Who is primarily involved with your project?

All our gardeners are members of our congregation because they are covered by our insurance. However, non-members could sign an agreement if they wanted to.

5. Does participation extend outside your religious group?

Not at the moment, however we have more people gardening now than ever before.

6. How has your project impacted the community?

The food pantry already knows and asks every season. The community knows we are generous. One of our members actually feeds a neighbor of his who is in dire straits. We also have an initiative to help veterans. There is an interfaith network which also donated money for seeds and compost bins. The community outreach is not just for us.

7. Do you see your project as an environmental effort or maybe part of the environmental movement? Please explain.

Yes, we cosponsored the Climate Rally in New York this month and many of our members went. Growing local is the only way to save the world. Corporations are killing us. We are involved in a lot of environmental stuff because we want a safe world and we are killing everything. We are involved in the anti-fracking campaign too. If someone comes to us with an idea and we think it will help the planet and sustainability, we pursue it.

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## #7 Judaism

1. What have you learned from your experiences with your faith-based agriculture?

People like to be a part of a garden because it makes them feel good. It's hard work and consistency is required. We have been doing this garden for three years; the first year there was a large group, then the second year there was less and the third even less. The people we have now though are really loyal. People are involved in other things and I understand that some people have other commitments and one of our members has an injury as well.

2. What have been the major opportunities and/or challenges faced in establishing/ coordinating your faith-based garden?

One of the major challenges has been finding time for everyone to work together. Everyone really has to be together to get the work done. Someone needs to do each of the jobs every day. There are times when we want the group to be together. We grow to give and to grow the community. We provide food to other people, but we like to do that together.

3. What was your motivation for beginning/ becoming involved with this project?

I was at a LICAN (Long Island Community Agriculture Network) MLK celebration where they had an interfaith service. There was a speaker who talked about the need for using the land to give food. He said it was a great way to do community service. Imagine if all the faith groups used their land to produce food, if we all did it together we could grow a tremendous amount of food! Our Rabbi was also very supportive and we had a great group of the start. The youth group and kids also got involved. But, really someone else suggested it, it was not really my idea per se.

#### 4. Who is primarily involved with your project?

Only temple members are involved. There are other gardens nearby and they were started by people in the area too who continued to plant and learned and continue it. These past few years the garden across the street was also passed off to community members.

#### 5. Does participation extend outside your religious group?

No, only temple members are involved. We have to drive to the garden also, so people have to have cars to get here. People not only have to want to help, but they also have to have the means. We also work with gardeners at a church down the road. Many people also have a plot for themselves and for donation. We give all the produce away, so we help a lot of other people too.

#### 6. How has your project impacted the community?

The greater community received tons of produce. We give to food pantries because they don't have much fresh food, mostly canned. So we help supplement, that's our main purpose. I learned that poverty is in our midst. We also participated in an organization's event this summer. We gave out food to hundreds of people. It was clear that there are some very hungry people, even right next door to me. We also donated to a pantry where we drop food a couple times a week and I am always amazed that there are always people there. It is incredible to me that there are so many people in need. I learned just how privileged we are. It keeps us grounded and makes us feel good, you always leave in a good mood. I like knowing that I am helping someone else live a healthier life. We are not just giving money, but the real thing. We actually did work that allowed someone else to eat, that's a powerful thing and it connects us as gardeners.

#### 7. Do you see your project as an environmental effort or maybe part of the environmental movement? Please explain.

...I guess so...because we are organic. I mean we don't use pesticides, but we don't really have a choice. If we had a different situation, I don't know if we would've chosen to do it this way. But, we did learn a lot from it.

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#### #8 United Church of Christ, Christianity

##### 1. What have you learned from your experiences with your faith-based agriculture?

If you can believe it, one neighbor actually complained that it was not appropriate to have a garden at the church. So, we camouflaged it a little more with flowers and bushes, so you couldn't actually see the garden. You have to be ready for that though if you are gardening in a residential area. Watering is also so important. We had no sprinkler the first year and everything died. Then we got a sprinkler system and that didn't work right at first either. We got many nursery donations of seedlings and also started having weekly meetings in the garden to review, a planning board of sorts. We also mulched,

weeded and harvested as a group. This year we generated over 850 lbs of produce which we donated. We also had a number of social meetings at restaurants and our own Barbeque. That loosened up the group.

2. What have been the major opportunities and/or challenges faced in establishing/ coordinating your faith-based garden?

Good soil was hard to find, but we get it now from the Recycling Center. We also have to do yearly improvements. There are things to do throughout the year, like putting down manure with the rototiller and preparing for the next season. We also had technical problems with our sprinkler system. You have to always be sure to keep an eye on it. We have one nice gentleman who is a master gardener, a college degree, he's in his 50's and he had all the equipment already. We also had some friends misunderstand what they needed to do and went away for four weeks vacation and didn't take care of the garden. People have to learn to understand how to treat plants.

3. What was your motivation for beginning/ becoming involved with this project?

I really like plants, but I also like the social aspect. I meet new people every week and learn a lot about plants. I am always surprised how much they know. I learned for example, that it was not good to have the sprinklers on in the early morning because having water on the leaves prevent some plants from photosynthesizing so well. So, we put a hose on the ground to irrigate instead. I also learned that too much water makes white marks on the leaves and affects their growth. We have community get-togethers and donate food to a homeless shelter. The goal is to also get the homeless involved in the gardening process. But, that's easier said than done. There is though, you see an ultimate goal other than just schlepping stuff there. The biggest challenge to me is to engage more people who would benefit from the experience of gardening.

4. Who is primarily involved with your project?

There are ten members, but they are always there. We are one of many church groups in the community.

5. Does participation extend outside your religious group?

Yes, people walk by and are interested and always stop to say, "what are you doing?" This could easily be done without the church though. It's a family tradition.

6. How has your project impacted the community?

Well, we have the vegetable delivery to the food pantry. It also created and stabilized relationships in the church and with non-church members. It widened the circle of people who are interested. On that block, I can't say we beautified the area, because it was already very nice to start with. But, on that note, a neglected area at the church may have been more noticeable.

7. Do you see your project as an environmental effort or maybe part of the environmental movement? Please explain.

Not really...It was more about finding out if we could do it. We did not have the environmental part in mind. But, keep in mind the environment in the area is very nice, so it was not a concern. Far up in the Bronx, there was a project the other day that improved how the area looks, that was very impressive. In hindsight, it was very easy.

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#9 Episcopal/ Anglican, Christianity

1. What have you learned from your experiences with your faith-based agriculture?

I have really learned that a community can do a lot together by gardening. I hadn't really done a project like this before and I was surprised by how many people wanted to get involved and learn about gardening. I also learned that in general, people like to work as a group toward a common goal. I met a lot of new people by doing this project and they were all so helpful and nice even when the work was hard. It just made everything so much easier to have a great group like that. I also learned how to harvest and the importance of donating produce to the less fortunate which we did through the Sunday School at the church.

2. What have been the major opportunities and/or challenges faced in establishing/ coordinating your faith-based garden?

Basically our two biggest challenges were time and weather. A lot of times I was gardening in the rain, because we always had to meet deadlines. I learned that you can't just plant things when you want to; each plant has to be planted at a specific time, even if the weather is not nice. We even finished putting in a fence while it was raining once. I worked with both kids and adults and actually the kids had the busiest schedules. They were really busy in the summer and when they were in school too, but they were such great helpers and always wanted to participate. So, I decided to focus the work in the spring more and in the fall when there was a lot to do and when we could harvest vegetables together.

3. What was your motivation for beginning/ becoming involved with this project?

I really like to help others, so when I learned that we could donate the vegetables to the pantry I was excited to help out. I am actually friends with the coordinator and she told me there is always a need for fresh produce because they mostly get non-perishables donated. I am also a Girl Scout and made this garden part of my Gold Award project. That way I actually got a lot more help, especially since a lot of this was new to me. I also thought the community church was perfect because there are always kids around and a great community. I liked the idea of bringing everyone together to do something good.



#### 4. Who is primarily involved with your project?

The community pitched in a lot and helped me to build and prepare the beds. At the beginning it was mostly me and my family doing the work and maintaining the garden. But, after a while families and kids started stopping by each week to help. Next year they will be willing to take over actually as a lot of the same families that started with me are really involved now. I want the garden to be a community project and not just me, so I can't wait to grow it more. What was especially nice was that the parents helped out because the kids were interested. You would probably think it was the other way around, but the kids really drew in a lot of people because they liked playing in the garden and being outside. My dad also helped me build the structure of the garden and the rest of my family helped a lot and really encouraged me to keep at it.

#### 5. Does participation extend outside your religious group?

Yes, mostly people were from the church, but my friends helped a lot too. Because I had an ad in the newspaper, I got a lot more attention. People in the community really liked the idea and wanted to help. One of my brother's best friends was actually so much help too. One day, he just came to the garden and asked if he could help. I got that from a lot of people though, they just like garden work I think.

#### 6. How has your project impacted the community?

The kids, especially from the Sunday School are now closer because they worked together gardening. The parents spent time together too and know more about gardening as a result. The project brought the community closer together because everyone was working together on a common goal. We also helped underprivileged people in the community by donating the vegetables we grew.

#### 7. Do you see your project as an environmental effort or maybe part of the environmental movement? Please explain.

Can you define what you mean by environmental? (ad hoc definition provided by interviewer).

Oh ok, well we did help people as I mentioned because we donated the produce. But we also didn't use any pesticides or anything in the garden. Plus, there were a lot of wildlife that we saw in the summer too.

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#### #10 Catholicism

#### 1. What have you learned from your experiences with your faith-based agriculture?

I learned how much kids want to learn about nature and gardening. My own kids were never really interested in such things, but the students I have worked with at this garden are always ask questions and are so helpful. Some kids are so focused even at a young

age and are so helpful. I am also always impressed with how much they know, even more than their parents do much of the time.

2. What have been the major opportunities and/or challenges faced in establishing/ coordinating your faith-based garden?

Dealing with garden pests like slugs and snails and still staying organic. I also struggled with handling debris and planting in areas that were shady. But, I learned how to handle them. It wasn't easy at first, but I learned all these wonderful environmentally friendly techniques; for example we go out at night with flashlights to collect snails and slugs from the garden. It's not the easiest way, but it is fun for the kids – we have kids from nursery up to eighth grade and they make it a game. The parents of course help too; we are blessed with many additional hands. It's especially nice to see the older kids helping the younger ones, some of them get volunteer hours for the work, but others just do it because they like it. We also have a big garden even at the end of the year to fundraise and share what the kids have learned with the community. We have crafts and giveaways and everyone gets together to celebrate. It really doesn't take that much money to do what we do though. A homeschooling association raised money to help us build the garden in the first place and they still help us out. But we compost and seeds and plants don't cost that much, plus we have a cold frame. We always find a way.

3. What was your motivation for beginning/ becoming involved with this project?

When they renovated the school a few years ago, we thought the kids should be involved with this new project in some way. This is a small thing that the kids can do to help their school. A Botanical Garden also sent me a planting schedule to help me plan my garden and really get it running smoothly. I also bring in different speakers that I know and admire each year to help educate the volunteers on composting, worms, rain barrels and other parts of the garden. The custodians at the school actually helped us build the structure of the garden. We had different Urban Park Rangers lecture about birds, wildlife, nature, plants and nutrition. It's slowly evolved. We learn from our mistakes and encourage learning experiences. We've been doing this for eight years now.

4. Who is primarily involved with your project?

Well, every year we send a flyer. We also always tell parents and caregivers that they are welcome to drop their children or stay and help. We always have a handful of dedicated parents every year. I also send a monthly email to everyone who signs up and I ask for help if we need it for a specific project or day. We ask families that join to commit to 45 minutes once a month.

5. Does participation extend outside your religious group?

No, all the families are from the Catholic school that the garden is connected to. Some of the parishioners have found out about the garden too though and they help as well.



## 6. How has your project impacted the community?

We have info panels placed around the garden to inform visitors about the butterflies, bees, birds and other wildlife in the garden; that way we teach people in the community about nature. The garden is always open to the public. We also have information panels by the compost bins. People also always come up and ask when I am working always saying "that's interesting." We also have a glass bulletin board though where we post info and articles from parents and presenters we have. We also used tree stumps from that big storm a couple of years ago to make seats for visitors and the kids. We give all the vegetables to the people who help with the garden. Plus, the students also work as tour guides when anyone comes to the garden, we prep them so the visitors enjoy that very much. We also have a program where we help people start their own worm boxes at home. We put paper and strings and worms in some of those cardboard fruit containers from the supermarket and people take that home to use.

## 7. Do you see your project as an environmental effort or maybe part of the environmental movement? Please explain.

I guess eight years ago when we started there weren't many community gardens, so our project was a big effort. But, now I've seen so many follow so we are more part of a group. Does that answer your question?

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## #11 Roman Catholic, Catholicism

### 1. What have you learned from your experiences with your faith-based agriculture?

Those who make official commitments last longer. For example, many of our members adopt plots and we put signs on the gardens that they are responsible for. Some even decorate their plots. Some youngsters participated at one point for their confirmation project and have continued on or passed on the work to others through the years. It also took a while to get recognition from the church and we were told by the bishop that we should cut down on expenses, even though we only really bought plants. For them the church was just a place for worship. The Hispanic community has a large garden which was a great base and helped us create a management structure and shared plants with us.

### 2. What have been the major opportunities and/or challenges faced in establishing/ coordinating your faith-based garden?

It was tough to find people to take care of plots when others could not. We also had to learn that the end of October is when we should close the garden for the season, but still keep families and the community engaged. We had the problem of kids aging out, especially when school let out we lost a lot of young people. For older people it is a physical challenge. Price as I mentioned before was an issue for us too, but now there is a farm that donates all the plants at the end of their sales season and that is a big help. I've

really had no trouble filling plots, I just put it in the bulletin in the spring to get new volunteers.

3. What was your motivation for beginning/ becoming involved with this project?

I was inspired by a woman who had a vision for a garden. We were in 4H together. She was just someone who kind of pulls you into things – I can't really explain it. It's just a nice thing to do and I want to see it continue. We very rarely actually lose a full group or family, usually some of the young people or older people come back and take over because it becomes a tradition. It's been a really positive experience and people are always willing to help.

4. Who is primarily involved with your project?

It is just the church community at this point.

5. Does participation extend outside your religious group?

We haven't reached out, but I can see it happening. We have very few rules. We don't dig up bushes without speaking with someone in the rectory, that's pretty much the only one. It's pretty much just do-as-you-please in your garden.

6. How has your project impacted the community?

Positively I would say. It's a place where people take pictures after communions and weddings. The Garden also has memorials to former members and pastors. People smile when they see the garden, it's an uplifting thing. Some people have also added planters to the front of the church now, so it is expanding in small ways.

7. Do you see your project as an environmental effort or maybe part of the environmental movement? Please explain.

I believe so! I truly believe the plants and flowers help to nourish us. I am a big believer in gardens. I have a big garden at home too. I have plants of my own and encourage my kids to do the same. My granddaughter is a college student and she always keeps me aware of environmental concerns and issues. People will also often stop and chat so I am always learning new things.